

## ***Lake Michigan Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee***

### ***Minutes-4-10-12***

**Attendees**-(By seating)Tom Hamilton, Steve Huff, Frank Krist, Ken Lee, Keith Wils, Heather Hettinger, Chris Hettinger, John Robertson, Jim Bos, Al Dood, Dan O'keefe, John Stegmeir, Scott Carey, Jim Bedford, Jim VanderMass, Dennis Eade, Bill Winowiecki, Jessica Mistak, Jay Wesley, Jim Dexter, Denny Grinold , Paul Jensen

**Guests**: Rodney Stokes MDNR Director, Hanna Kruckman-Fenske Scholar

Chair Grinold called meeting to order at 10 AM.

Minutes of last meeting were approved.

Attendees made self-introductions.

Director Stokes-Thanked committee members for their service. Commented on the success and pattern demonstrated by this group and how this has been used as a model to develop citizen engagement throughout the DNR. Noted that this group has been active nearly 25 years.

### **Roundtable Stakeholder Reports:**

Paul Jensen—Commercial Fishing-Muskegon netting operations started-average whitefish catches. Early charter trips reporting “boxed out” – 5 on boat –two trips in succession. Mixed 50 fish salmon bag. Only one clip. Reports that fishing good up to Stoney point.

Tom Hamilton-Great Lakes Sport fishing Council White Lake watershed-Commented on concerns with fisherman's Landing and Possible land swap with Sand Products Corp. Has been discussing issue with Sen. Geoff Hansen's office.

Frank Krist-Lake Huron Chair- —southern part of the lake doing very well. Chinook, (Steelhead, Lake Trout—some Coho) Alpena having a perch run.

Ken Lee-Great Lakes Sport fishing Bay deNoc-perch fishing Big Bay de Noc doing really good. Steelhead at Manistique in river.

Chris Hettinger-River fishery good- Betsie 57/ 58 deg. fish swimming over the dam. Spawning fish on gravel. Sporadic concentrations spawning. No sucker runs in Betsie. Fish movement pattern different.

John Robertson-MUCC-Grand River fishing excellent this winter. Perch just starting. Winter ice fishing was nonexistent. Spring Lake one day of ice.

Jim Bos-PM Watershed- good fish thru winter. Two good weeks in March. Waiting for dry fly season.

Al Dood-West Michigan Walleye Club-Erie walleye –West Sister lots of big fish. Walleye fry in ponds.

John Stegmeir-Isaac Walton League-good reports out of Rouge River. Most fish since 80's.( Steelhead)

Scott Carey-Schoolcraft County Sport fishing smelt runs sporadic—not many dipping locations—Perch fishing 9 to 13 inches Garden area-Lamprey snagging in Manistique. No lamprey traps in. Mentioned disparity in fish plant number ratios between the U.P. (fewer) and downstate sites like Lansing. (more)

Jim Bedford-Trout Unlimited-better than normal steelhead runs in Grand system. Fished a mile from home –catching mixed bag steelhead and bass.

Jim VanderMaas-Michigan Steelheaders-Whitehall- Perch fishing on west end was good open water from boats in January. Steelhead runs on White River.

Dennis Eade-Michigan Steelheaders-Holland-catching fish 3-7 lb. range. 220/240 ft. depth- 3or 4 in the 10 lb. range.

Bill Winowiecki-Grand Traverse Sport fishing Association-MCBA-Petoskey Bear River-Limit catches Steelhead, West Bay Grand Traverse –few whitefish. Forage fish problem??Seeing small Lake Trout- looked like Pike. No feed- really skinny. Browns 100,000 planted -2 reported caught—expensive forage. Crystal Lake fisher reported catching 4 lb. Perch.

Denny Grinold-MCBA-Fished lake south (Benton harbor) caught last year's plants- smaller fish. Reports from Indiana and Illinois on good Coho catches. Grand Haven /Muskegon area reports “on fire” good numbers –big fish.

**Coho Stocking Grand River-** 2nd largest Coho stocking in the State. Fish ladders allowing fish passage. Stocking and survival issues fostering criticism on this stocking program. 295,000 Coho stocked in Lansing to promote an urban fishery. Want to move bulk of them below Lyons to improve survival. Power plant does shut down when smolts are present. However it is difficult to determine when that actually should occur. Jim Bedford suggested more smolt trapping possibly using volunteers. We need to work on helping them get downstream. It was mentioned that some fishers thought they were catching smelt at \$2.00 /fish so maybe different location would reduce impact. Suggested that a concrete wall needs to be altered to allow lateral movement to the fish ladder. Planting 300k in system returns maxed at 3500 at Weber ladder. Approximately 1% returns. Coho natural tendency to spawn in smaller streams seems to override the imprinting tendency of upstream plants. Power plant going off line in 2013 which will help water temperature issues below Morse Dam. Mentioned that on the Platte system some fish seem to “park” at the wier. John Robertson mentioned intuitively it would seem that plants below the impediments would be a better choice. Consensus of the discussion was that it was time to try something different. Adjustments to the plan could be tried –with the benefit of being flexible with the changes.

**Lake Michigan Salmon Stocking Strategy-** Jay Wesley provided an extensive overview of the structure and process that has been developed to address this complex issue. Explained goals of transparency and public involvement. Overview provided of Dr. Mike Jones of MSU and the work with the Decision Analysis Modeling. Core groups from each state representing access to large stakeholder forums were brought together in several meetings to develop the proposed goals and objectives. Several plans (26 +) were produced that were reviewed by the Lake Michigan Committee (LMC). LMC discussed and

reviewed plans and settled on the four options to be presented to the public at the Salmon Stocking Forum –April 14<sup>th</sup> in Benton Harbor. Sea Grant is coordinating the forum and will be providing a website and webinar for receiving public comment through May 15<sup>th</sup>.

Jim VanderMaas described the proposed plan as playing Russian roulette with a 6 –shooter with 5 of the chambers loaded. The multiple negative trends that are impacting the fishery were highlighted and detailed. Conclusive statement was that a 5<sup>th</sup> option be added and that it would be to cut plants for 2 years coupled with extensive monitoring to track results.

Frank Krist-echoed Jims remarks and the similarity to Lake Huron which resulted a feeling of too little—too late on the Lake Huron Chinook fishery.

John Robertson-modeling is not perfect-natural reproduction introduces high variability.

Tom Hamilton-Steelhead response was positive –need to do the right thing for the Great Lakes.

Paul Jensen and Denny Grinold related the experience of attending the GLFC annual Lake Committee four days of meetings in Windsor. The information was over whelming in that many trends were very similar. The trends were disturbing in that they represented changes some good –some bad- depending on your perspective. Lake Huron is rapidly returning to a native species restoration. Lake Michigan is following trends very similar to those of Lake Huron. The underlying forage problem cause may be bidirectional. Bottom –up changes caused by positive changes like the Clean water Act and negative changes from quagga mussels causing phosphorous reductions which reflect on Chlorophyll and phytoplankton production which in turn reflect changes in lower trophic levels causing bloaters, smelt , and alewives having less to eat---resulting in a lower forage bio-mass. Top-down changes caused by excess predation based on continued planting and runaway natural reproduction which reflect in fewer older forage fish capable of supporting large reproducing forage concentrations.. Lake MichiHuron is becoming oligotrophic which brings them both nearer to Lake Superior.

Denny Grinold also pointed out that Lake Superior has demonstrated that there is a time when planting can be stopped. The success with Lake Trout restoration has returned that Lake to a no plants situation. We need to carefully assess when that option may need to be considered. Natural reproduction of Chinook may well be self- sustaining and should no longer be clouded by hatchery fish. Wisconsin is perceived to have issues with planting reductions because of a lack of terminal fisheries and limited natural reproduction.

The intense discussion surrounding the VanderMaas proposal prompted Chair Grinold to share concerns with the group. He was concerned about under cutting the trust and collaboration efforts that had been established with representatives of the other states interests. Dennis Eade and John Robertson also indicated a level of concern with harming those relationships. Mention was made that possibly Michigan was too transparent in providing information. Lake Huron Chair Frank Krist indicated strongly that he disagreed –transparency is all part of trust building based on knowledge.

Director Stokes commented on the success being demonstrated of the collaborative work in progress being illustrated by the group discussion. He emphasized that the transparency builds the public confidence. The short coming of this group is that we are not clearly communicating to the public on what we are doing internally in committee—we have limited visibility to the public. Director Stokes excused himself to keep a prior appointment.

Chair Grinold asked for additional input. Several round table comments were made on the fact that the issue has been the topic of discussion—we know the “crash” is coming—we need to be in it for the stakeholders—don’t drop the ball- do we have consensus?

Question was asked –if we can’t change the Saturday meeting agenda –what can we do. We can attend and provide comments, we can place comments on the website, we can send a correspondence to the fisheries chief stating our position –if we take one!

Chair called for a motion if there was one? Jim VanderMaas moved that we stop planting of Chinook for 2 years combined with an aggressive monitoring program. Tom Hamilton 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion. Chair called the vote—Vote was unanimous in favor –no objections-no abstentions. Chair directed “scribe” to write the letter. Letter emailed for review-corrections–finalized and sent to Jay Wesley, Jim Dexter, and Denny Grinold -04-11-2012. (See attached-Jim Dexter LMCFAC-4-11-12)

**Fisheries Division Update**-Acting Fisheries Chief Jim Dexter-- Kelley Smith has retired and is presently traveling out west in Utah. Bill Moritz will take Kelley’s position as Deputy Director—was previous wildlife chief. Fisheries Division is developing a strategic plan with a 3<sup>rd</sup> party facilitator working with a core team of 22 staff members lasting thru 2012. Conference call last week with constituent’s leaders around state concerning budget reductions that the department is facing. Vacant positions are not being filled from the outside. Retires are eating up funding. Employees longer than 31 years in service need to be covered monetarily upon leaving the department. Division is preparing to potentially face reductions next year. Acting positions are permanent based on current division status? - was queried by Tom Hamilton. Jim explained that civil service positions are typically only filled by an acting position for one year. Currently we have 5 acting positions. Interviews are being planned and /or on-going for the Chief’s position.

**Kelley Smith Retirement**- Dennis Eade suggested it would be appropriate to present a plaque to Kelley recognizing his years of service to Fisheries and the people of the State. 2<sup>nd</sup> by John Robertson. Chair directed “Scribe” to prepare and facilitate.

**Commercial Fish Law Enforcement Update**-Lt Steve Huff –LED—Current staffing four boat Captains -1 Investigator-Tribal consent decree enforcement is bulk of the work ,also monitor State licensed fishery and Wholesale fish dealers. Vacancies unit supervisor –and Leland, Rodgers City, and Charlevoix officers. Special event patrols –maritime security provided. Vessel service hours 506 patrols – \$17,000.00 fuel bill. Several court cases were reviewed with interactions with the tribal court system. Little Bay de Noc walleye case was a trilogy, 105 violations reduced to 79. Snowmobiles and nets forfeited. \$30,000.00 original fines reduced to \$16,500.00. Subsistence fishing license revocations changed from life to 1 year. Ended up charging subsistence tribal fishers with conspiracy—4 day trial—

selling fish not taken commercially. Eventually got them into state court. All found guilty and fined \$3620.00 each Total restitution of \$19,772.00. Sentenced to 12 months in jail—out after 6 months. Fishers cited for 139 violations --tribal judge's order reduction to 10/12 violations. Same fishers as a previous incident one year prior—court assessed fine of \$300.00. November—Little River band out of White Lake—nets should be removed or tied shut during closure. Observed and cited for taking fish after closure. Revoked permit for 30 days. Fined \$350.00.

USCG working to begin basic commercial fisheries enforcement in cooperation with MDNR LED. LED has acquired side scan sonar to observe wrecks and view trap nets with possible fish during closure periods.

Canada stopping Asian carp shipments at boarder. Presently working with Motor Vehicle Enforcement officers to get them up to speed on fisheries issues. Aquatic invasive species intercepts occurred only at Canadian border. Asian carp iced down with no water—still alive. Routed thru Indiana and Illinois appear to be coming from Arkansas. Arkansas fish farms are big business—politics and money—Michigan does not have a Port of Entry. Our border patrol does not typically intercept these vehicles.

Tribe assigning additional law enforcement to Little Bay de Noc area. Law enforcement has been active working with fisheries division on fishing legislation rewrite.

Canadian fishers in American waters is another ongoing activity.

**Kids Pond Fishing Regulation**—Heather Hettinger- seeking comments and opinions on Kids Pond Fishing Regulations. Explained program and associated regulations. Problems with older individuals fishing on ponds. Directed group focus was still on Kids fishing -some problems with seniors. Lead activity to increase interest by kids in fishing opportunities. Scott Carey explained issues his group was having with managing their pond activity. Jim Bedford questioned what was being stocked. Officers involved with enforcement and do frequent visits. Committee very receptive to activity and supports the activity.

**Little Bay de Noc Walleye Stocking Strategy**—Jessica Mistak-- highlighting work done with stakeholder groups in the U.P. Catch of commercial walleye peaked between 1941 and 1957 over 6 million pounds. Commercial fishing banned in 1969. Walleye collapse blamed on smelt and alewives predation. Walleye stocking strategy copied from the Saginaw Bay profile. Also have adopted a Walleye RED FLAGS analysis. Using an OTC marking procedure to monitor stocked walleye compared to natural reproduction. Facing same environmental problems in the Bays that we are seeing in the lower Lake. Natural mortality 55% --angle mortality around 10%. Developed meeting program with the stakeholder groups which brought them into the decision making process. Using a rolling 15 year comparison window to look at data. Working on a written program document. Alewife dropping numbers influencing higher numbers in the Bay. Tagging showing Walleye migration. Walleye populations may never reach prior levels due to the changes in Lake Michigan.

**Whitefish Catch Reports Grand Traverse Bay**—Jay Wesley---slides comparing sport and commercial harvest in GT Bay. Good catch in 2005 falling off ever since. Leland Harbor construction moved tribal fishers into GTB. Tribal fishing effort now less in bay. Sport effort down as well. Whitefish reproduction questioned. Cisco catches 20 per hour—different strain. Local anglers dialed in to where they are. Early

tribal consent decree pressure heavier in the Bay. Randy Claramunt recommended as a good source of additional input.

**Lake Michigan Fishery Management Plan**-Jay Wesley---running way behind on the plan. Working on public survey. Frank Krist asked that MDNR involve Lake Committees on a lower level. Jim Dexter indicated input and involvement would occur at an early entry level.

**Committee Notes on MDNR Website**-Jay Wesley- plan is to post notes on the DNR website. Discussion seems to indicate it would benefit the visibility and transparency of the committee. Some clarification required on the content and how it should be presented. Level of detail difficult to determine. Who interprets what content to remove or edit? Suggested possibly a condensed version could also be produced. Appears a standard or guideline would be helpful. Jay Wesley will work to coordinate how we proceed with information distribution.

**Jay Wesley announced to the committee MSU awarding Denny Grinold its Honorary Alumni Award.**

***Congratulations!!!!!!!***

Location and date of next meeting-October 23 2012-Old Boys—Spring Lake

Meeting adjourned 2:53

Notes by Paul Jensen LMCFAC Secretary